

The first set of wartime migrants into the city were prisoners of war released from Confederate prisons in March 1865. The freed prisoners, totaling over 10,000 in the months following the city's occupation, were released from Salisbury and other Confederate prisons of the Carolinas in various states of health and sickness. Wilmington residents opened their homes to assist in caring for these men, but, being strapped themselves, they did not have much to offer other than shelter. Another set of immigrants were the approximately 8,000 to 10,000 refugees who were sent to the city by General William T. Sherman after he paused his march in Fayetteville.⁵⁶ The men, women, and children were freed or escaped slaves who had been following Sherman's march through the South. Encumbered by their numbers, Sherman sent them to the city, planning for their eventual removal northward. The refugees first arrived in March and suffered greatly from the lack of provisions for their welfare. One of the worst problems posed by the deluge of deprived and malnourished people was the outbreak of typhoid and other diseases. Doctors recalled that between twenty and fifty people died daily in the city. Most of the refugees were relocated to rural areas around the Cape Fear region by April, relieving some of the city's burden. Others who remained received supplies from the American Missionary Association and the federal government in return for work, particularly that of cleaning the city's streets and wharves, thereby assisting in the economic recovery of the city. By the time military authorities had the catastrophic situation in Wilmington under control, the war was officially over.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, *Reconstruction in North Carolina* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1914), 148.

⁵⁷ In 1860, Wilmington's population was just under 10,000 people, including slaves. In the months



"Escaped slaves arriving in Wilmington, N.C."
1865. *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, April 29, 1865.

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leading up to the city's capture by Union forces, many families that could afford to leave fled the city to interior locations and some slaves escaped to find safety behind Union lines. The city's population tripled in March and April 1865 with the addition of approximately 15,000 Federal troops, 10,000 released prisoners of war, and 10,000 refugees. Fonvielle, *Wilmington Campaign*, 449-452.